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Leadership Competency Series

The 'Coffee Bean' Leader

'Impact and influence' is the ability to persuade and convince others, choosing a right way to make things better around us when things are at their worst, says M R CHANDRAMOWLY.

Rohit, the Manager - Employee Relations of a multinational star hotel, shared with his Group Head, about his professional problems and how things were so hard for him. He did not know how he was going to influence and convince people and he wanted to give up. He was tired of fighting and struggling and as it seemed, the moment one problem was solved a new one arose. His Boss, who was an expert chef, took him to the kitchen. He filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Soon the pots came to a boil. In one he placed carrots, in the second he placed eggs, and the last he placed ground coffee beans. He let them sit and boil, without saying a word.

Rohit watched with impatience and was wondering what the Boss is up to. In about twenty minutes the boss turned off the burners. He fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. He pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then he ladled the coffee out and placed it in a bowl. Turning to the manager, he asked, "What do you see?" "Carrots, Eggs, and Coffee," Rohit replied. He brought him closer and asked him to feel the carrots. Rohit did and noted that they were soft. He then asked Rohit to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, he observed the hard-boiled egg. Finally, he asked Rohit to sip the coffee. He smiled, as Rohit tasted its rich aroma. Rohit humbly asked, "What does it mean Sir?"

He explained that each of them had faced the same adversity — "the boiling water", but each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting. But after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior. But after sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hardened. The ground coffee beans were unique. They were in the boiling water and changed the water.

"Which are you?" he asked Rohit. "When your survival and success depends on impact and influence, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?"

The "carrot type" of people become soft and loses strength. The "egg type" start off with a malleable heart but with in a short time of serious incident like death, a breakup, a divorce, or a layoff become hardened and stiff. Their shell looks the same, but they bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and heart. The Coffee Bean is the 'Leader'. It changes the hot water. Coffee Bean leaders understand the situation and use best methods to change the thing

around them. If you are the Coffee Bean leader, when things are at their worst, you get better and make things better around you. The Leadership Competency “Impact and Influence” is the ability to persuade, convince, negotiate with, influence or impress others so that they end up supporting a critical plan or idea. Leaders with this competency think through complex dynamics of communication before they present arguments. They present their viewpoint by fully paying attention to the needs and point of view of others.

Influencing is about choosing the right way. Based on the strong desire to have a specific impact or effect on others successful leaders use a specific type of impression to make, or a course of action or a direction that they want others to adapt to the benefit of organisation. In a Direct Persuasion approach, they appeal to the reason using data or concrete examples and restate the same points when confronted with opposition. Some leaders try different tactics of Multiple Persuading method. Here they make an effort to adapt to the level or interest of an audience making two or more different arguments or points in a discussion.

Anticipating the effect of an action or outcome of acceptance is another method where leaders plan how to deal with each issue of resistance, edit and change their communication style in an acceptable combination of persuasive actions. They demonstrate sensitivity and understand others looking for a “win-win” opportunity. They are careful to detect underlying concerns, interest and emotions of others and use an effective method of response, building trust and influence. It takes more than one action to influence. With each well thought-out, unusual action a leader gradually builds up influence. The use of circle of influence over the circle of concern is another dimension to look at this concept.

Two circles - influence and concern

Everyone has a circle of influence and a circle of concern. Circle of concern is the boiling water and circle of influence the choice of becoming a coffee been, a carrot or an egg. Circle of influence are things, which you have direct influence over. You have direct influence on your attitude, how you respond to situations, what time you will wake up -go to sleep, how much effort you will put into your business today or what you will eat today and whether or not you will take the time to exercise.

Circle of concern is things over which you are concerned about, but do not have direct control. You may be concerned about the weather, but no matter what you do or what you say will not influence the weather. The person who concentrates on his circle of influence will succeed, while the person who watches the expanding circle of concern will be left wondering why he did not succeed.

If you are committed to learn this leadership competency it must have a visible process. You express care and concern while impacting and influencing behavior in positive way. What kind of tactical approach can be used? One way to start is to make use of tips like Seven Cs. These principles shadow behavioral approaches as a proven way to influence behavior. They encompass: caring, coaching, correcting, confirming, collaborating,

clarifying, and conciliating.

Caring: Include displaying genuine concern, making personal visits, greeting by names and willingness to listen to personal problems. Caring can be contagious and it develops trust and is the foundation for the remainder of the Seven Cs.

Coaching: Involves demonstration and repetition - “show and tell”. It is facilitating to do things through a trial-and-error process. In coaching, a door is always left open for questioning and feedback. It supports learning directly.

Correcting: It’s about helping people to change behavior if they are willing to. “Correcting” cannot be used without the consent of other person. Once the correction is effective, it brings out significant influence.

Confirming: People remember the true and little words of praise, especially when they are trying out something looking out for confirmation of their approach and methods. A genuine supportive confirmation of their right deeds will impact and influence behaviour.

Collaborating: Helping people to network and provide opportunities to team up with like-minded.

Clarifying: Goals and objectives are communicated but clarifying at personal level and helping people to understand what is expected from them is essential. By clarifying individual, goals, strategies and values, people can better align their own behavior with what is really important to them.

Conciliating: Is an ability to identify conflicts and meet agreements to establish direction to towards common goal. Strained relationships cause an unhealthy downward spiral, which leads to a decline in morale, productivity, and performance.

A “coffee-bean leader” work towards helping others reconciling differences and resolving conflicts. Human values such as trust, positive attitude, equality, compassion, truthfulness, self discipline, and gratitude underpin the competency “Impact and Influence”.

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